

Sūrah Ṭāriq

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of the previous one: Sūrah Burūj. Both have the same central theme. The only difference between the two is the style of the discourse and the arguments presented. If one views them with regard to their introduction and ending also, one finds amazing similarity between the two. In the light shed by the signs of the world around man and the one within him as well as the attributes of the Creator of this universe, the addressees are informed that they should not regard the day of reward and punishment of which the Qur'ān has threatened them to be a matter of jest. It is certain to come. The delay in its advent should not mislead them to deny it. The Almighty is in fact giving them respite so that they are left with no excuse to deny the truth and their end is drawing near. Compelling is the scheme of God. Thus He does not show haste in seizing the arrogant; but when He does, no one is able to free himself from His clasp.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence adopted in the discourse:

Verses (1-4): Heavens and earth are called to witness on the fact that nothing is beyond the eyes of God. He has deputed guardians on every soul. Both men and jinn are under surveillance. He can seize anyone at anytime He wants to and punish him. No one is beyond His control.

Verses (5-8): The rejecters of the Day of Judgement are urged to reflect on the fact that the substance from which man has been created is not rare so as to be beyond God's access; on the contrary, he is made from a drop of fluid which emanates from his own body. When the Almighty has the power to fashion a drop of his fluid into a living being, how can He be powerless to re-create him.

Verses (9-10): A mention of the fact that the Almighty is fully aware of all the words and deeds and even secrets of the hearts and all hidden details. One day, all these secrets shall be examined and assessed. On that day, no person will have any of his own support and backing which can be of any help to him nor will any intercession be of any benefit to him.

Verses (11-14): A general physical phenomenon is presented to argue that the Day of Judgement with which the Qur'ān is threatening its

addressees is no matter of jest; it is, in fact, a certain reality which is bound to waylay them one day; people should try to prepare themselves for this day instead of making fun of it.

Verses (15-17): The Prophet (sws) is assured that the schemes devised by his enemies in order to reject him should not lead him to despair; he should give them some respite. The bait thrown to them by His Lord in seizing them after they gradually entangle themselves in deeper sin is bearing results. Soon they will be facing their fate.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ (١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ (٢) النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (٣) إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَمَّا
عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ (٤) فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ (٥) خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ (٦) يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ
الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ (٧) إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (٨) يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ (٩) فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا
نَاصِرٍ (١٠) وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ (١١) وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ (١٢) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ فَصْلٍ (١٣) وَمَا
هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ (١٤) إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا (١٥) وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (١٦) فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمْهَلُهُمْ
رُويْدًا (١٧)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The sky and those which appear in the night bear witness – and what have you understood what those which appear in the night are? Glittering stars – that there is not a soul which does not have a guardian over it. (1-4)

Let man reflect on what he has been created from. He has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs. Indeed, He is fully capable of creating him again. (5-8)

On that day, all secrets will be scrutinized. Then at that time neither will he have any power nor any helper. (9-10)

The sky when rain bursts forth from it and the earth which splits asunder bear witness that this is a decisive word. And it is no jest. (11-14)

They are conniving a plot and I am also devising a plan. So give respite to these disbelievers; leave them a while. (15-17)

Explanation

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ (١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ (٢) النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (٣)¹

Just as in the previous *sūrah*, the sky consisting of fortresses is sworn by, here in this *sūrah*, the sky and its glittering stars are sworn by. This oath, as has been explained, is meant to testify to a premise which is stated ahead.

The literal meaning of the word طَارِقٌ is “one who comes in the night”; here it refers to the stars which appear in the night. The Qur’ān itself has explained this word by the expression النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (glittering stars).

The question posed by the words وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ (what have you understood?) is to direct attention to the magnificence and importance of this testimony. The implication is that no one should regard this testimony to be an ordinary one. It is indeed a potent testimony if the serious minds are able to deliberate on it and don’t make fun of it.

The expression النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (glittering stars) does not refer to some specific star. It only refers to the genre of stars which is very similar to its usage in the following verse: وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ (١٦:١٦) (and through the stars are they rightly guided, (16:16)). In some other verses also, it is used thus to connote the genre the way it is here. However, the adjective الثَّاقِبُ (glittering) signifies that only those stars are referred to here whose light reaches us of its own accord and for whose observation advanced telescopes are not required; every person can observe them through the naked eye and learn from them the lesson which the Qur’ān intends to teach here. It must be kept in consideration that the number of stars cannot be gauged by merely counting what one can see; this is just a small part of the great treasure trove. Who else than the Almighty can know the number of worlds and the number of stars.

إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ (٤)²

This is the premise which is meant to be substantiated from the oath sworn earlier. The use of the word لَّمَّا is rather unique. For this very reason, grammarians have differed in its interpretation. I have already alluded to my research in this regard while explaining verse one hundred and eleven of Sūrah Hūd and verse thirty five of Sūrah Zukhruf.

One of the aspects of the premise to which stars bear witness viz. the Almighty has appointed guardian over every soul is that man should

1. The sky and those which appear in the night – and what have you understood what those which appear in the night are? glittering stars.

2.- that there is not a soul which does not have a guardian over it.

reflect on these divinely appointed innumerable eyes which remain awake all night and stare relentlessly at the inhabitants of the earth; no one can dare escape their gaze. The greatest of telescopes invented by science do not have the power of the most ordinary star of the firmament: the light from these stars pierces various layers of atmosphere and reaches the earth. Only a very naïve person can think that there can be things which are beyond the notice of God – the God Who is displaying such majesty of His power every night as depicted in this verse.

The second aspect is the same as referred to in the previous *sūrah* and as mentioned at other places in the Qur’ān: the Almighty has built forts and observation posts in these stars from which devils who dare to enter the prohibited territory are pelted with shooting stars. This system set up by God bears testimony to the fact that this world is not an un-minded lot. At every nook and corner of this universe, He has deputed sentinels who guard everything day and night; hence it is obvious that a Day of accountability is bound to come and no one would be able to escape this accountability.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ (٥) خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ (٦) يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ (٧) إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (٨)³

In these verses, attention is focused on the sense of responsibility which should arise in a person who has grasped the reality that this world is not unattended; its Creator is watching over each and every thing; when He is doing so, then it is essential that He bring about a day when virtuous deeds and the consequences which correspond to them are brought before the virtuous and evil deeds, and the consequences which correspond to them are brought before the evil.

In the words فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ man’s attention is directed at his own being: if he merely reflects on it, he will find such majestic manifestations of God’s power, wisdom and creativity that he will cry out that the Almighty Who can create him with such great abilities from such an insignificant drop of fluid is fully capable of creating him again after death.

The greatest doubt raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement was that they regarded being re-created after death to be an impossibility. In order to dispel this doubt, the Qur’ān has asked them at various places to just reflect on their existence. In Sūrah ‘Abas, such people are chided in

3. Let man reflect on what he has been created from. He has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs. Indeed, He is fully capable of creating him again.

the following words:

فُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَّرَهُ ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ
ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ (٨٠: ١٧-٢٢)

Woe to man! How ungrateful he is! From what has his Lord created him? From a drop of fluid. He made him and proportioned him. Then smoothed out the path for him. He then gave him death and had him placed in a grave. Then He will raise him again whenever He desires. (80:17-22)

Consider next the verses: يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ خُلِقَ مِنْ مَاءٍ دَافِقٍ (he has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs). In these verses, the nature of this fluid, its way of exit and the place of its origin are pointed out. This is done so that man comes to know that this fluid is not a rarity nor does it originate from a place which is beyond the jurisdiction of God; it bursts forth from between the spine and chest and later providence fashions it into whatever form and structure it wants to and then brings it from the womb of the mother. The implication is that how is it not possible for the Almighty whose great power and wisdom a person is able to witness in one's own self to bring him back to life. Sūrah Infiṭār discusses this very aspect in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا
شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالذِّينِ (٨٢: ٦-٩)

O Man! What is it that has lured you away from your Beneficent Lord, Who made your sketch, then fashioned you and then gave you due proportion and He put you together in whatever shape He pleased. [There is no doubt about the power of this God]; in fact, you want to deny reward and punishment; [for this reason you are putting forth such doubts]. (82:6-9)

The verse إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ refers to the fact that the Almighty Who has displayed such majestic power and wisdom in creating man is certainly able to re-create him once he dies. The antecedent of the pronoun in رَجْعِهِ is the “man” who is asked in the verse فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ to reflect on his creation. It should be kept in consideration that though the words used are general, the real address is directed at the Quraysh. It was the Quraysh who wanted to render ineffective the Qur’ānic *indhār* by

creating such senseless doubts.

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ⁴(٩)

Mentioned in this verse is the nature of accountability people will be faced on that day. The implication is that not only perceptible words and deeds will be assessed, but covert deeds, ill-intentions and evil secrets will also be examined. The Almighty has instruments which are able to detect and record deeds done and words uttered in the most concealed of places. These instruments will be able to disclose the extent of sincerity or lack of it in each and every deed. It should be kept in mind that on that day even the limbs of a person will bear witness to all his deeds. So when limbs will bear witness, what possibility is left for a secret to remain a secret?

فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ⁵(١٠)

On that day, a person will neither have his own power and strength to defend himself nor anyone from amongst his supporters and comrades or even his deities and intercessors to back and support him. The inner and outer selves of a person will be exposed like an open book. Only the decision of God will be implemented without any hindrance or hesitation.

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ (١١) وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ⁶(١٢)

In the previous verses, the Hereafter and life after death are substantiated through man's being and existence. Here, in these verses, this premise is substantiated through some physical phenomena.

The word رَجْعُ is explained by linguists to mean (continuous rain). Such rain, of course, is instrumental in blessing the earth with life and greenery.

The word صَدْعُ means "to split asunder". Rain opens the pores of the earth and it swells by absorbing water and very soon becomes lush and verdant. Though this bloom is not mentioned in words, there is a strong contextual indication to it. There is great brevity in the style adopted, since the premise is substantiated through swearing oaths.

At other places in the Qur'ān, it is expressed in various styles that re-creating mankind is no difficult a proposition for God at all. Those who were doubting this are censured; they are chided for denying something

4. On that day, all secrets will be scrutinized.

5. Then at that time neither will he have any power nor any helper.

6. The sky when rain bursts forth from it and the earth which splits asunder bear witness.

they witness every day. In Sūrah Anbiyā, such doubters are referred to thus:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٣٠:٢١)

Are the disbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were joined in one solid mass which We tore asunder, and that We have enlivened everything from water. (21:30)

One can look up the explanation of the above verse in this *tafsīr*. The fact that the sky and the earth were blocked alludes to the fact that neither did water rain down from the sky nor did the earth sprout any vegetation. However, when the Almighty opens the pores of the sky and sends down water, the earth also opens up the doors of its treasures. Similarly, whenever God wants, He will make mankind rise from this earth in which it is buried.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ فَصْلٍ (١٣) وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا هَزْلٌ (١٤)⁷

Just as in the previous *sūrah*, the rejecters of the Day of Judgement are warned to not make fun of the admonition sounded to them by the Qur'ān and that this Qur'ān is an exalted discourse revealed from the guarded tablet, similarly, at the end of this *sūrah* also a new style is adopted to inform its addressees of the fact that the day of accountability which the Qur'ān is informing them of is an indubitable reality; one day, they shall have to face it come what may; hence they should not make fun of it; prudence demands that they should listen to it carefully and understand it and prepare for the advent of that day.

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا (١٥) وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (١٦)⁸

Here in these verses, the Prophet (sws) is assured that if people are making fun of his admonition then it is not because they really have some doubts in their hearts which could be removed through reasoning or by seeing some miracle. These doubts are being put forward only to escape the reality. The objective is that neither they should listen to the Prophet (sws) nor allow the common man to accept his teachings. In this manner, their religious leadership will remain intact and they will be able to follow the whims they have been following.

7. That this is a decisive word. And it is no jest.

8. They are conniving a plot and I am also devising a plan.

The verse وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (I am also devising a plan) is the Almighty's response to the plot they were conniving. As per this plan, He is giving them respite so that they reach their prescribed term and when they are seized by Him, they will be left with no excuse. The naive people are regarding this respite given to them as their success. In reality, they have been caught in the noose of the Almighty's law of retribution. The more time they are being given, the tighter is becoming the Almighty's clasp. This, in fact, is just an explanation in different words of what is said in the previous *sūrah* thus: وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ (٨٥: ٢٠) (and Allah is surrounding them from all sides, (85:20)).

فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمَهُلُهُمْ رُؤْيَا⁹ (١٧)

The implication is that when the Almighty is surrounding them from all sides, whatever respite they get should not be any cause of alarm for the Prophet (sws); therefore, he too should grant them reprieve for some time; he, while getting tired of their demands and accusations, should also not desire from the Almighty to show them a sign of the promised punishment or to even obliterate them completely.

The expression أَمَهُلُهُمْ رُؤْيَا is an explanation of the initial part of the verse: the respite is not to be of an unspecified duration; it is only for a short time so that they can revel in whatever merrymaking they want to; they will have to meet their fate one day.

A special thing worth considering here is that the Prophet (sws) is being asked to give them respite, which, in other words, means that the reins of their fate have been handed over to him by the Almighty; He only desires that the Prophet (sws) should give them a little more time.

This brings us to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. فالحمد لله على احسانه (gratitude be to God for His blessings).

Lahore,
23rd October, 1979 AD
1st Dhū al-Hijjah, 1399 AH

9. So give respite to these disbelievers; leave them a while.